

Guernsey Sundials

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This small A5 sized booklet only comprises some 48 pages yet and at last, it starts to fill a void that has existed for far too long regarding the sundials of the Channel Islands. It is only since 1990 that the BSS Register has recorded the presence of *any* dials in Guernsey and this work finally brings the existence of the dials of that excellent Island to our attention.

Now, it is common knowledge that for any Englishman to comment on anything emanating from the Channel Islands is to place himself seriously at risk of referring to these Islands as a part of the UK (which they most certainly are not!). They are formally called the *Crown Island Dependencies* and (just about!) form part of the *British Archipelago of Islands*. I shall stick with that – rightly or wrongly and, if wrong I shall beg forgiveness in due course!

For mere UK mortals trying to understand where these dials are on Guernsey there are two small problems, namely that the locations of the public dials are not marked on any map in the book and, furthermore, that Guernsey does not use the UK OS National Grid. Indeed none of the Channel Islands do, as far as I know. The various Islands have instead developed their own grid systems. Jersey's is quite different from Guernsey's too. All understandable when you realise that the Channel Islands have their own individual independence and additionally (and ever since 1066) generally see the UK as an acquisition of theirs rather than they as one of the UK. So, such 'mere mortals' as we in England, Scotland, Northern Ireland or Wales should therefore rely on good old Latitude and Longitude unless we happen to be on the Island and actually have one of their own maps in front of us.

Although written rather more for the Islander than the tourist, this isn't a work that simply describes the dials that can be seen by any visitor; it also touches on some that are privately owned and not open to the public's gaze. Additionally it covers the history and development of dials and the terminology that is used to describe them. With nearly 40 photographs and something like ten diagrams it is not only a useful work, it is a scholarly work as well.

Those Guernsey church dials that can be dated are mostly shown to be from the 1680s and later. However it is intriguing to see suggested that one of them at least, that on St Saviour's Church, might date from the 16th Century at the latest and even be similar to one at Chartres Cathedral..

For my preference and trying to think of the non-dialling purchaser, I felt that the reader was rather precipitated into the early chapter on the *History and Development of Dials* and I would have liked to see some illustrations in that chapter to introduce the reader

rather more slowly. It isn't always easy from a textual description alone to imagine the 'L' shaped shadow clocks that were used by the ancient Egyptians!

The final two chapters describe how a Guernsey resident can devise their own dial whether it be an Horizontal, Direct South facing Vertical or an Analemmatic Dial and details are given of the care needed when setting up such dials.

Any book review should consider all aspects of a publication. There is the occasional oddity in '*Guernsey Sundials*', perhaps arising from the patois used on the Island, like the use of the (less common) word *Donjon* for a castle's keep. But there you are; it all adds to the delight of this little book even if it did send me to my dictionary!

Sadly, a few of the photos are rather too small and of too weak a contrast for them to show real detail – a case in point being the nocturnal and portable dials of Castle Cornet.. Nonetheless, for those with more youthful eyes than I (or those actually like me but with magnifying-glasses in hand!) most show the details that you need.

An excellent glossary explains the terms used though I personally would have preferred to see terms explained (or references made to their explanation) as they are introduced. '*Equation of Time*' is one such; first mentioned on p21 yet barely explained in the glossary and only fully explained on pp 29-33.

For me too, the *Guernsey Liberation Monument* is much understated in this booklet – undoubtedly because of the modesty of the author who played such a large part in its design. Yet, this has to be one of the most important modern sun monuments in the British Archipelago. (Have I got that right?) It is one I would love to see – especially (in sunshine!) on Liberation day itself, May 9th - and it should be better publicised. All diallists should surely place this on their must-see list. Rarely does any sundial of any sort and regardless of age, reflect the suffering, heroism and subsequent delight and freedom of the people it serves.

But these are all very minor criticisms which in reality do not detract from what is, after all, an excellent work which should intrigue both the holiday visitor and the diallist alike.